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Steve Hagimont, *Pyrénées. Une histoire environnementale du tourisme*. Ceyzérieu: Champ Vallon, 2022. 367 pp. €26.00 (pb). ISBN 979-10-267-1050-9.

Review by Patrick Young, University of Massachusetts-Lowell.

As a volume in Champ Vallon's series "L'environnement a une histoire," Steve Hagimont's book *Pyrénées: Une histoire environnementale du tourisme* sits alongside emerging work in French environmental studies by scholars such as Fabien Locher and Charles-François Mathis, as well as recent English-language work by Diana Davis, Michael Bess, and John McNeil.[1] It also harkens in some respects to earlier formative studies such as Bernard Debarbieux and Gilles Rudaz's *Les faiseurs de montagne*, or Alain Corbin's *Le territoire du vide* in its broad analysis of the historical intermingling of natural environment with social and political processes and mentalities over a given historical *durée*. [2] The 2017 *thèse* that is the book's foundation remains visible in the fine-grained treatment Hagimont brings to many parts of his story, enabled by wide reading of official sources from the inter-ministerial down to the communal and municipal levels, private archives of associations, and an array of published medical, geographic and tourist texts. Hagimont's overarching concern in the book is the historical conversion of the mountainous natural environment of the Pyrenees, chiefly via tourism, into one accommodating the investments and appropriations that propel modern capitalist societies. The drive to extract value from mountain nature was, he shows, historically interwoven with the development of an "communauté émotionnelle" (p. 219, p. 335) of solicitude for the mountain environment, resulting in a *patrimonialisation* that has failed to quell the inherently uncontainable character of environmental change.

Hagimont construes environmental history as "une histoire sociale qui interroge les bases et les implications environnementales des rapports sociaux" (p. 13). The book's approach treats tourism as an arena of convergence for nature, society, and economy: both cause and occasion of environmental intervention. Human actors are front and center in this story for the most part, especially key intermediaries such as doctors and local notables, state officials, engineers and architects, alpinists, and excursionists who refashioned the mountain environment into something consumable. "La nature touristique," in Hagimont's telling, was always a highly contingent and often contested thing, however: a product less of any linear process of colonization than of a co-construction linking local and external interests and agencies (p. 19). This history of mountain conversion and reimagining through tourism has long held the Alps as its primary point of reference; the comparatively fitful and uncertain development of mountain tourism in the Pyrenees affords Hagimont a less familiar but in some ways more textured case study for the environmental history of tourism.

The book's six chapters trace an evolving touristic appropriation of the Pyrenees from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century. The first chapter introduces touristic *aménagement* as a mode of deliberate economic development, based in the extension of tourist infrastructure, investments, and imaginaries to areas deemed to house significant natural or cultural riches. Hagimont dates this phenomenon further in the past than is conventional, showing how in the Pyrenees royal intendants with road-building ambitions first aligned with doctors and other local notables to identify thermal springs as potential resources for local economic benefit. In the initial and somewhat halting efforts of *aménagement* that ensued over the first half of the nineteenth century, Luchon provided the first notable success of mountain tourist development in the Pyrenees, based in loosely coordinated governmental action at the municipal, regional, and national levels that established the beginnings of an infrastructure of access and attraction around thermal sources. Over time, the thermal *stations* at Luchon and Cauterets came to represent a leading edge of nineteenth-century urbanism, integrating hitherto quite localized sites and natural environments into larger networks of meaning, mobility, and investment. An appropriation of nature that had broader attraction and profit potential, mountain tourist *aménagement* also precipitated new concerns over the hygienic and budgetary provisions necessitated by seasonal population increase, as well as the natural threats posed by fire, avalanche, and flooding that menaced the new agglomerations.

To enter into the commercial and social logic of this emerging *territoire touristique*, the book's second chapter deploys Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia, which connotes places set apart from the everyday and the ordinary and comprise a *pluriactivité* of pleasure-based pursuits and possibilities. These were also places, however, that required new disciplinary regimes to regulate the freer movement of capital, labor, and bodies within their novel urban/natural milieux. Everything that came into contact with visitors in this environment--workers, local population, prostitutes, scenic landscapes, animals, and smells--was subject to enhanced scrutiny and regulation. In an extended discussion of tourist guides, Hagimont exposes the contradictory pressures and expectations that ensued. What was at first a mostly informal, occasional, and supplemental source of employment for the local population became, in the later nineteenth century, subjected to new norms and disciplines around training, dress, and comportment, consistent with the heterotopic logic of the thermal tourist environment.

The medical side of thermal tourism similarly invested the mountain environment with value and ushered in new disciplines and separations designed to secure that value. Promotion of the mountain environment as salubrious dated to the eighteenth century and was given considerable ballast by local notables, doctors, and medical inspectors, who lent scientific credence to the benefits of thermal waters, altitude, and mountain air for the treatment of specific maladies and for more general *bien-être*. The conception of the regenerative and prophylactic mountain environment was one that separated that environment from mountain-dwelling populations themselves, making it an object of solicitude and of privatized access. Yet, as Hagimont shows, the medical and touristic functions of mountain *stations*--the needs of *curistes* and tourists, in other words--coexisted uneasily at times, with debates and conflicts extending well into the twentieth century. In one example, the public health mandate (Revolutionary and Napoleonic in origin) that thermal stations be made accessible to soldiers and to local and indigent clients, threatened to introduce aspects of a "promiscuité sociale" that *stations* were keen to avoid, leading to spatial and procedural interventions to cordon off the various groups of clients. Over time, the medical aspect of the *stations* would recede before their more touristic features, especially as advances in

hygienic medicine and laboratory science began to make thermalism seem archaic. Though there was concerted effort on the part of doctors and others to re-medicalize mountain tourism, the new scientific understanding of microbes and viruses added momentum to the conversion of mountain *stations* into primarily consumerist, leisure environments rather than medical ones.

The book's fourth chapter explores how tourism effected a geographic, social, and symbolic reordering of the mountain environment in line with its new economic importance. Among the ever-expanding number of "users" of the mountain, Alpinists and other excursionists were particularly important to the development of popular knowledge of the mountain environment, and of norms and expectations around mountain nature and experience. In this they were, like doctors, key intermediaries elaborating the terms by which outsiders could lay claim to the meaning and value seen to inhere in mountain environments. Alpine enthusiasts and organizations gender-coded different kinds of mountain engagement (desire and domination, aesthetic appreciation and the ascent), and lamented crowding and development as a cheapening of mountain nature. Along similar lines, tourist texts and imaginaries conventionalized the Pyrenees as a "musée vivant" of preserved nature and peasant community, with the Spanish Pyrenees, in particular, made to embody a "frontier orientalism" (Andre Gingrich) of outer limits and cultural alterity (p. 181). An even more significant component of this touristic reordering of the mountain environment was the marginalization of agro-pastoralism as a local economic endeavor. Hagimont evokes the longer history of French advocacy and state intervention around forest protection to show how tourism contributed to the stigmatizing of pastoralism and communal land practices as deleterious to local environments--the latter cast increasingly, and not least by tourist organizations, as a "bien commun national" (p. 168).

The thermal and *mondain* tourism that had developed over the nineteenth century reached its apogee by 1910 in the Pyrenees, giving way thereafter to a more varied landscape of tourist usage. Hagimont's fifth chapter recounts the rather uneven twentieth century development of locations and infrastructure of *sports d'hiver*, and the "commercialisation de la neige" (p. 274) that they augured. Seeking to build upon Alpine precedents, national associations such as the Touring Club de France and Club Alpin Français advocated a winter season of snow-based tourism, finding support from local actors and established tourist interests in Luchon and other sites, as well as funding from the Société des chemins de fer et hôtels de montagne. Superbagnères (near Luchon) and Font-Romeau were the first and only sites in the Pyrenees to offer winter tourism until the installation of lifts and the popularization of skiing in the 1930s led to a proliferation of slopes and resorts. These sites drew direct benefit from the much-expanded role of the state in tourist *aménagement* after 1945, which brought winter tourism into the orbit of regional economic planning. Yet, as with thermalism, winter tourism was highly contingent, and prone to "incertitudes permanentes" p. (274)--principally unpredictable snowfall, but also returns on investment and a growing coterie of local and national critics that decried over-development and a corresponding "artificialization of the mountain" (p. 268).

Indeed, as the book's final chapter suggests, the modern appropriation of the Pyrenees' mountain environment reached its twentieth-century culmination in the formal conversion of that environment into a protected patrimony. Hagimont argues for the interconnection of environmental exploitation and protection, in a "géopolitique du patrimoine" that brought together tourism, agriculture and industry--as well as local and non-local populations--in a logic of rational-profitable landscape and environmental usage (p. 277). As had been the case earlier with respect to agro-pastoralism, tourism came to coexist uneasily with other economic uses of

the mountain environment in the twentieth century, especially the hydroelectric and metallurgical projects that became a fixture of the landscape. Equipped with a new legal framework of landscape classification and protection, tourist interests acted directly (and often successfully) to constrain the visual, aesthetic, and environmental impacts of these enterprises in the Pyrenees. Hagimont also tracks the post-1945 rehabilitation of agriculture in the Pyrenees, in the face of rural depopulation and the feared desertification of mountain environments that had come to assume patrimonial identification and value. Interestingly, (eco)tourist and agricultural interests now converged in the encouragement of return to the soil and the bolstering of mountain agriculture, including the revival of traditional agro-pastoral practices such as transhumance. The nationwide movement to constitute national parks likewise extended to the Pyrenees, with the inauguration of the Parc National des Pyrénées in 1967. Hagimont reads the establishment of national parks as an extension of rural *aménagement*, embedding nature conservation within a territorial imaginary still informed by the unquestioned rationality of growth and management. But here again, he captures the countervailing movement of adaptation and resistance by activists and local population to *grands projets* of nature protection—with the protracted conflict over the Parc naturel régional des Pyrénées Ariégeoises revealing a “instrumentalisation politique de la nature” (p. 314) on the part of both supporters and opponents of the project.

The environmental history of tourism that Steve Hagimont proposes is therefore one in which tourism established a framework for continual human engagement and appropriation of the mountain environment of the Pyrenees well into a present of radical uncertainty (p. 348) about what this and other tourist territories will become. As the book’s introduction indicates, Hagimont aims to counter a current of scholarship that has cast *mise en tourisme* as akin to colonization. Like earlier studies by Andrew Denning, Michael Childers, and William Philpott, Hagimont’s qualifies Hal Rothman’s influential thesis in *Devil’s Bargains* by teasing out the conflicts, contingencies and reversals present at every step of the Pyrenees’s development as a tourist sanctum.[3] Indeed, a main strength of the book is the highly detailed and nuanced portrayal of the power dynamics and causalities at play in both tourism and environmental change. The work of fully incorporating ecological understanding into this picture is for Hagimont, as for most emerging scholarship in this area, (happily) a work in progress. It lies perhaps beyond the book’s scope to provide a full accounting of the ecological change bred of the dramatically increased presence of tourist infrastructure and traffic in the Pyrenees. There is certainly some suggestive broaching of the issue at different junctures of the book, most notably at the tail end of chapter four, where Hagimont discusses the “*écosystème touristique*” that arose from the new cohabitation of seasonal and local populations. In addition to the permanent environmental perturbation of new infrastructure, tourist activities such as hunting and fishing, along with the increased need for food provision to thermal *stations*, caused alteration to the composition of local flora and fauna and to the local economies bound to them. Likewise, the turn to artificial snowmaking (prompted in part by warming temperatures and poor skiing seasons) brought machine technology to the higher altitudes and also required the creation of artificial lakes and other hydrological disruptions. These and other examples are presented in the book more as discrete environmental impacts than as facets of a deeper-seated transformation in the mountains’ complex ecology. While it remains daunting for historians to penetrate nature’s sovereign agencies, causalities and temporalities, Hagimont very ably captures the Pyrenees as an ever-evolving landscape, a product of historically interwoven cultural and ecological change.

## NOTES

[1] Fabien Locher (dir.), *La nature en communs. Ressources, environnement et communauté (France et Empire français. XVII-XXI siècles)* (Ceyzérieu : Champ Villon, 2020) ; Charles-François Mathis et Jean-François Mouthot (dir.), *Une protection de l'environnement à la française (XIX-XX siècles)* (Ceyzérieu : Champ Villon, 2015) ; Diana Davis, *Les mythes environnementaux de la colonisation française au Maghreb* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Villon, 2014). Michael Bess, *La France vert clair : écologie et modernité technologique (1960-2000)* (Ceyzérieu : Champ Villon, 2011) ; John R. McNeill, *Du nouveau sous le soleil : une histoire de l'environnement mondial au XX siècle* (Ceyzérieu: Champ Villon, 2010).

[2] Bernard Debarbieux and Gilles Rudaz, *Les faiseurs de montagne : imaginaires politiques et territoriales, XVIIIe-XXIe siècle* (Paris: CNRS, 2010); Alain Corbin, *Le territoire du vide: l'Occident et le désir du rivage, 1750-1840* (Paris: Aubier, 1988).

[3] Andrew Denning, *Skiing into Modernity: A Cultural and Environmental History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Michael Childers, *Colorado Powder Keg: Ski Resorts and the Environmental Movement* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2012); William Philpott, *Vacationland: Tourism and Environment in the Colorado High Country* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014); Hal Rothman, *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-Century American West* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998).

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